The Black Cat



MAY 1912

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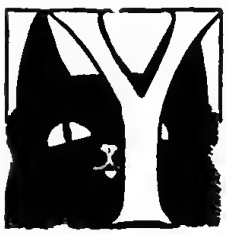
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The Man Who Couldn't Keep a Dog.*

BY FLORENCE TABOR CRITCHLOW.



"YOU'RE a stranger in Ten Strike, Mr. Hudson, or I guess you'd know better'n to give a dog to Bloody Snell."

So said Dan Wiester, the dog-man. I had been telling him of the queer behavior of my yellow dog, Luck, and of her three puppies. Freckles, Doctor, and Nebuchadnezzar. Dan raises bloodhounds, and trains them to find people who are lost, and those other people who wish to lose themselves, conveniently.

Dan is unlearned, save in dog-lore, but not unlettered. Twice he has been to the back side of the map to get pure-blood dogs for his kennels. He reads German better than he speaks English, for he feeds his mind on the old romances. I took my meals with the Wiesters, though I lived by myself in the two-room shack next door.

My business in Ten Strike has nothing to do with this tale of the Reverend Baldwin Snell, except that it made him, as the representative of education, my earliest and most intimate acquaintance in the raw western town. He was not only a minister, but also a man, than which I can find no stronger word of characterization. Physically, he towered above and spread beyond the diminutive pulpit, which had been proportioned rather to the visible than to the spiritual church, and fitted admirably the somewhat anaemic

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ministerial-type men who frequently occupied the former as representatives of the latter.

Although Snell was determinedly handsome, there was nothing effeminate about his strong, fair features, unless it were the flitting, occasional tenderness in his dark violet-gray eyes. Now, I don't like that color epithet. It sounds like the school-girl gush over a pretty little curate. Actually, however, there is no other word that can adequately describe the minister's eyes, when he let that peculiarly fascinating tone of brooding emotion purl into his rich and essentially masculine voice. That voice alone could have won the adoration of any mortal woman. Its softer cadences, nevertheless, he reserved for appropriate pulpit passages. This must have been entered by the Head Bookkeeper on the credit side of the man's personal account, and should be remembered with gratitude by the husbands and fathers of the church members of Ten Strike.

He never made love to any one but Myrta Freeman, who played the cottage organ at church and watched the minister with dog-like brown eyes of devotion. She was a shy, incapable young girl, who always asked her mother which dress she should wear. She had tried to teach the village school, and had had to give it up, in the middle of the term, because she hadn't character enough to control a dozen little children.

Snell's sermons, if not profound, were wholesome, which was probably nearer the needs of male and female Ten Strikers. At least, everybody went to hear them. In the Book of the Preacher is it written, that it is better to be listened to than to be learned?

Not that the Reverend Baldwin Snell wasn't learned, too. I found him well read in half a dozen sciences and as many literatures. He gave me the freedom of his library in the bachelor shack-parsonage beside the church. The quality and flavor of his books surprised me no less than the quantity. For the presence of certain rare and expensive works of reference I was especially grateful, inasmuch as I had anticipated the necessity of tedious and frequent trips to San Francisco, and even to Chicago, to consult them. Such books were never bought from the surplus of a country parson's salary. A rare East Indian rug covered the floor. Another hung on the only wall not lined with book-shelves. The few pieces of bric-a-brac were rich men's fancies.

"A legacy," he smilingly explained; "a fortune big enough to make of me a good-for-nothing gentleman, if my habits and my conscience didn't drive me to work."

He labored in Ten Strike, not only with his mind for the salvation

of souls, but with his money for the temporal welfare of bodies. His enthusiasm and his splendid strength enabled him to do, not the work of ten men, to be sure, but the work of at least ten ministers. His pet project was the Mabel Baldwin Home for Mothers. He explained it to me, while we watched the digging of the foundations.

"Pretty big building for a village like Ten Strike," I commented.

"I want mothers to come here from all over the United States," he replied. "It's a memorial for my mother. Any woman who has borne a child, and is poor, should be pensioned. I intend to do it, so far as my means allow, until the State takes hold."

With the book lover's bond upon us we became fairly good friends. The more I saw of him, however, the more certain I was that Baldwin Snell was one of the essentially lonely men. Such men, whom loneliness envelopes with an impenetrable atmosphere, and clothes with a spiritual garment of darkness, are happily, rare. You and I have each been conscious, at least once in our lives, of being actually alone in the universe, separated by the flesh from all understanding and fellowship. Can you conceive a hell more hideous than perpetual existence in that isolated consciousness?

For a brief period I wondered if the name by which he was often spoken of held the explanation. In frontier towns, as among Indians, college students, and other semi-barbarous peoples, names are given for their fitness. "Bloody Snell" would suggest a crime which, known to himself, whether known or only suspected by others, would cause him to feel set apart from common humanity. It might have been the unintentional shedding of blood. One could not associate the man with either fraud or purposeful violence. Snell, however, did not seek isolation. On the contrary, he seemed always stretching forth spiritual hands toward his fellows, but unable to see theirs, which were offered to him eagerly.

The first time he came to my rooms I called Luck forward, as usual, to be introduced. Luck was a yellow nondescript, built like a bulldog, but twice as big. By the touch of his firm, clean hand on her coat I knew him for a lover of dogs. His pale gray eyes grew dark and tender as he looked deeply into her big brown ones.

"What a splendid head!" he cried, with genuine enthusiasm.

"You and Luck will be great friends," I prophesied. "If her recognitions aren't supernatural, they are, at least, hypernatural."

Luck steadily returned his look, gazing long and far into his gray eyes, and through and beyond them, perhaps, into his soul.

Inquiringly, she turned to me. I refused to help her make up her mind. I somehow felt that he needed the respect and affection, and understanding, of a dog. To be efficient, nevertheless, the dog's good opinion must be voluntary. If Luck accepted him only at my command, the act would be mine, not hers. Moreover, for her own sake, I would avoid coercion of her private conscience. If a dog has a soul, then it can only be saved by the development of its free will. She looked again, shook off his hand, growled under her breath, and lay down in the darkest and coldest corner of the room, with her back to us.

"I have never been able to persuade a dog to like me," he said, wistfully.

"I never knew Luck to show such bad manners. The long journey must have made her cross," I apologized as well as I could.

Never afterward, however, did Luck acknowledge his presence, unless by the slow, and perhaps involuntary, stiffening of each separate hair of her yellow coat.

"It doesn't matter," said the minister, speaking lightly, but even then I knew that it did tremendously matter.

Next day I found Dan Wiester among his bloodhound puppies, teasing them, and teaching them.

"They won't hurt you," he reassured me. "Real bloodhounds are never the kind that want to kill and tear. They're genuine dog; not a drop of wolf blood in them."

"What do you mean by that?" I asked, making friends with the young dogs.

"Well, some folks will have it that all dogs are just tamed wolves. I know better. Some are; not all."

I told him the story of Luck and the minister.

"Them yellow mastiffs have coorous feelings, sometimes," he drily commented.

"Is Luck a mastiff? I thought she was a mongrel."

"Why?"

"Chiefly because she's yellow."

"Don't you believe it. She haint one of them bulldogs they tie the name of mastiff to, nowadays. She haint got any fashionable points. I'd ruther have character, myself. She's one of the kind they use to call mastiff, in the old country. They're real first-off dog, not tame-wolf. And the nearer they be to clear dog, the yellower their hide is. They've kept the real dog sense, too. They're about the wisest dog there is, next to bloodhounds, and the hardest

to understand. My bloodhounds are real dog, too. You don't have to tame the genuine dog breed, as you do the domesticated wolf, and you can't, neither. You can't make a slave of him, but no 'call of the wild' is ever going to make a traitor of him, neither."

Luck was in Ten Strike because she loved me. She was a gentle, harmless, effeminate, useless creature. Because I loved her I would have left her at home, comfortable, until I returned. This, however, I couldn't explain to Luck. I knew, because it had been tried. I could tell her what tool I wanted, and she would fetch it from the shed to the field. But previous experiences had proved that she would certainly die if separated from me long enough for hunger to come to its natural end.

When I expostulated with her on the unreasonableness of such feminine affection, she responded, more emphatically than Ruth to her mother-in-law, "Where thou goest I will go or know the reason why." Since our arrival in Ten Strike neither Luck nor her family had had any opportunity to get acquainted with the native animals. So their strange prejudice against the Reverend Baldwin Snell could not be due to local canine gossip.

"Why don't you have a dog, for company?" I asked Snell, a few weeks later.

I was in his library. Notwithstanding the books, which to me are like living presences, I was down-pressed by the fearfully lonesome atmosphere. It choked me, and blinded me, like dense purple fog. To look at, the room was cheerful. It felt like the haunted dungeon of some world-old and forgotten castle, rather than like itself, a raw board shack in an unseasoned town. The familiar books were but the ghosts of my friends. Snell himself was a dark, far-off, shadowy presence.

"I wish I could keep a dog," he dreamily assented.

"Well, why not? There's plenty of room here; the church yard is inclosed. Mrs. Fringle, who boards you, will gladly give you scraps. You need an obstreperous young dog to disturb your dull habits."

Now that wasn't really disinterested. I didn't love Luck's family —yet. They still preferred my slippers and note books to the more nutritive mush and milk diet.

"If a dog would stay with me—" Snell gulped his breath. "I'd be good to a dog."

"Of course you would. Come and take your pick. Freckles is the prettiest, Doctor the wittiest, and Neb will love you the best."

"If you'd just as soon, Hudson," the minister hesitated curiously,

"you'd better choose, and bring it over. Luck objects to me."

So, he was sensitive to the prejudices of a dog. I chose Doctor, so named for the black spectacle rims about his ridiculous, owlish eyes. The incongruity between his antics and his solemn appearance ought to kill all the blue devils with laughter. I carried him across the town in his own covered basket bed. It was the first time his nose had ever been outside of our own premises. Snell was not at home. I read for an hour or more, while the Doctor played contentedly, made himself acquainted with his new environment, and, finally, curled down in his basket for a nap. Next morning, I found him on my own doormat. His ears hung at half-mast, his tail dragged, his eyes were bloodshot. When Snell came after him the little fellow crawled at my feet, shivering piteously.

"I didn't mean to let him get away," Snell sheepishly apologized. "He was so afraid of me. He wouldn't stay *put* in his basket; just lay all night at the doorsill, crying, and dodged out this morning at the first chance."

I gave him Freckles instead of Doctor. She came home the same night, howling. I went back with poor, stupid Neb.

"See here," I said, "I'm going to camp on your lounge until Nebuchadnezzar gets over being timid."

His basket was placed by the head of Snell's bed. Neb crawled out and snuggled up to me. I sent him back. For the good of his own soul, as well as for the comfort of mine, a dog must learn obedience. He sobbed all night. Well, all puppies do that. I went home. Neb stayed a week, I suspect because he didn't know enough to come home. After that, I fetched him, because he was dying. I was sorry for the dog, but sorrier for the minister.

"There haint a dog in Ten Strike likes Bloody Snell," said Dan Wiester. "I wa'n't a-going to tell you, because I didn't want to side up your dogs against him. They'd find out anything you knew. Them yellow dogs is mighty knowing. They're real dog."

"Surely, he isn't cruel to them," I protested, rejecting the first floating straw of suspicion.

"He don't have a chance to be, does he?" Dan drily cross-questioned. "But I guess *that's* all right. You c'n most generally tell a cruel man by an up twist in the out corner of his eye, that the minister haint got."

"But there must be some cause," I persisted.

"Ye-es, I s'pose. You know," he watched my face uncertainly, "they say dogs can see things men can't."

"Oh, don't try to turn my story into anything so vulgar as a

ghost," I laughingly demurred. "That new parsonage can't be haunted."

"No; but maybe the man is. The dogs act around him like they smelled blood. Ever hear how he got such a nickname? Baby Fringle began it, trying to say 'Baldwin.' It stuck, only because the boys thought it fitted. Hank Upton says it's an omen."

Then we both laughed, because Hank Upton's omens are the village joke.

Not long after this, Dan and his two best dogs were summoned to an eastern city. A millionaire had mysteriously disappeared. Since the relatives could not trace him by the smell of his gold, the dogs must try to follow the scent of his blood. Dan took Percy and Stella. Did I say that he named all of his dogs after the heroes and heroines of fantastic romances?

It was the week following Dan's departure that the Reverend Baldwin Snell began his wonderful series of sermons on the Fifth Commandment. So far as I know, this is the only time that a single text has furnished material for an entire revival. The first week, he talked about Honor, and so convincingly that Jim Reeves paid Syme Hall for the barrel of crackers he'd eaten while loafing behind the stove in the grocery store. If that isn't sound conversion and a testimony unto righteousness, what is? There were numerous repentances, but none other so picturesque as this one.

"Only," whined Jim, "they were kind of stale, along toward the bottom. Seems to me you'd ought to give a discount for that."

You can't convert a paper collar into a silk shirt, even with the highest voltage religion.

A week's exposition of Fatherhood sent wayward Ted Dalton home to Connecticut. After the first sermon on "Mothers," Cyl Burns married poor little Maudie Lyman, and Cal Harker sent a money order, the first in five years, to Michigan. The Nickelodeon was closed for lack of patronage,—temporarily. The Revival was the leading attraction. Even the return of Dan Wiester was scarcely noticed, though ordinarily it would have been a thrilling episode.

"I tell you, Hudson, I was proud of Stella and Percy," said Dan, while we ate supper. "Tracked the old codger straight to the poorhouse."

"The Poorhouse!"

"Yes, sir-ee, the poorhouse. Relations wouldn't believe they was right, but I made 'em go in and look. Told 'em I knew the dogs, if I didn't know Grandpa. Seems, Grandpa'd got an idea he was

going to be a pauper, and that his grandchildren was going to take, or had taken, all his money, and was going to send him over the county road. So he saved 'em the trouble. Funny things you see in a place like that, don't you?" He broke off suddenly, and pushed back his chair. "Finish your preserves; don't mind me. I've got a little business with the minister that won't keep."

"Better wait till morning," I advised. "It's pretty near meeting-time."

"This haint prayer meeting night," he paused, perplexed.

I told him about the wonderful revival.

"Well," he insisted, "I guess my news ought to be help to him."

The little church was crowded to the doors that night. Dan was late, but he elbowed his way through to the place he had asked me to keep for him. By the obstinate creases in his face I knew that his interview with the minister had been unsatisfactory. The "other minister," that is, the pastor of the one rival church, was on the platform. He had been heard to say that while, of course, Mr. Snell's theology was all wrong, it didn't really matter, since he preached a gospel that made for righteousness. Snell himself was late. Myrta Freeman, the shy little organist, was early in her place. While people were coming in, and getting seated, and afterward, while we waited, and sibilantly whispered, she played the old tunes, not choosing, but taking them page after page as they came in the book. Her mind was evidently on her lover; her eyes were fixed on the place where he should enter.

If the Reverend Baldwin Snell had been disturbed by Dan Wiester's news he did not show it. His eyes were radiant with tenderness. He preached on "The God of Motherhood." That sermon was surely the most sympathetic eulogy ever pronounced upon the sacrificial unselfishness of mothers. Occasionally an incomprehensible smile twisted the homely face of Dan Wiester.

At the close of the sermon there was the usual request that penitents come forward. The organist was playing softly a hymn of emotional appeal. All over the house men and women were moving to the front. Many were sobbing. Dan Wiester rose with abrupt decision. I made room for him to pass into the aisle, supposing he wished to join the "mourners." But from where he stood he spoke across the crowd to the minister. His voice, not harshly loud, but clear and resonant, rose above the noise of pushing shoulders, and shuffling feet, above the urgent whispers of the helpers, above the drawl of the cottage organ.

"Horace Baldwin—Snell, are you going to write that letter to your

mother? You know, now, and I think you knew before, that she is in the poorhouse. I saw her there, last week, scrubbing the floors. Her poor old hands, the same hands that used to make your breeches, and wash your socks, and iron your shirts, are now so gnarled and twisted that she can scarcely hang on to the scrubbing-brush. Her back is so bent that she has to be helped to kneel to her pitiful work."

Persons who had risen in their pews sat down. Those already in the aisles stood still. The feeble old tune died away. The organist forgot to press the pedals, though her fingers continued to wander over the keys. Her dog-like eyes were fixed trustfully on her lover. Whatever shock others had felt, her faith did not tremble.

Snell's handsome, strong face, illumined from within, softened to the exquisite pathos of a youthful St. John. His eyes grew splendidly dark. His voice became lyrical with suppressed emotion.

"My mother is dead," he patiently explained, and paused significantly.

Relief swept over the people in visible waves. We grinned at the humble dog-man. Our idol was vindicated, his enemy was confounded. We no longer hung in Mahomet's coffin.

"I myself closed her dying eyes, after I had received her last blessing. When I could no more honor her in life, I wrote my love in stone forever above her honored grave. You know that I am now spending the greater part of my private fortune on a home for mothers, as a memorial of my own mother."

The organ burst into a grand old hymn of triumph, but was stilled in the first stanza as Wiester again raised his voice.

"Yes, thank God, the mother who brought you into existence is dead. But what of the woman who nourished you? Shall I recall your pitiful story, Horace Baldwin, by courtesy Snell?"

Your mother sold you to the Snells, because, she said, she was too pretty to grow old taking care of a brat. I knew her in those days. I heard her say those words. You were sickly and nasty with disease. Henry and Martha Snell took care of what your own mother loathed. They surrounded your childhood with luxury, which they could not afford for themselves. Trying to win more money for you, Henry made an unfortunate investment. His shares went bad. His money was gone. But you were never allowed to feel the difference. They did more for you than they would have felt the necessity of doing for a child of their own. Henry died

from overwork and taking care of you when you had pneumonia. His will had been made when he thought he was rich. Martha had the homestead, you had the shares. He trusted you to take care of Martha. She spent her own little income to bring you up like a gentleman. She mortgaged her home to send you to college, and took in washing to finish your seminary expenses.

"Then the old railroad was rebuilt. You sold your shares for an enormous fortune. About that time Pretty Baldwin came whining around about her loneliness for her only child. You put her in a fashionable hotel, squandered gold on clothes for her, and when she died, you put her worthless body in the costliest casket you could have made. There was nothing wrong in that, of course. But, meanwhile, the mortgage on Martha Snell's home was foreclosed. You knowingly let her go to the poorhouse. When I saw her, last week, and recognized her for my old schoolmate, she said:

" 'Tell Horace I don't want money. If only he'll just write to me once in a while, it would make life easier to bear.'

"And you have refused to write that letter to comfort a loving mother-heart. Horace Baldwin, even a dog would despise you."

Startled, we looked at one another. The same thought, apparently, had come to every one,—whether the dogs could have felt the strange coldness of this man at heart. Could they have felt that he had committed the one sin unpardonable in the dog's yet unwritten religion, the sin of ingratitude? Expectantly we waited to see what the minister would do. If, even then, he had shown sympathetic, though belated regret, had said that he would write that long-delayed letter, we were ready to forgive him, to take him into our hearts again. He need never have been lonely any more. The little organist rose, and glided toward the platform steps, holding out her hands to him. She would have led her lover to his rightful place at the penitential seat. He waved her imperiously back to her place.

"We will close by singing hymn number 231."

The tone was decisively final. That was all he had to say to us. With one accord we rose and departed. The "other minister" spoke to Baldwin Snell, who shook him off. The other minister came down among the people.

Slowly the little organist left the platform. Her brown eyes were no longer dumb and dog-like. They were hard and bright. At the door I looked back. There, unmoved, stood the loneliest

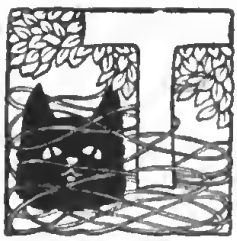
soul in the universe, the man whom not even a dog could like. We went out of the church door silently, with lifted hats, and eyes downcast, as men pass the coffin of a friend, for the last time before the lid is screwed down. With a whimper like that of a dog, when he licks the hand that struck him, the little organist ran back, and knelt before the penitential bench, with a passionate agony of sobs.

For no man is so bad but that some good woman prays for him.



His Ideal Girl.*

BY MARY MORRISON RAYNAL.



THE only trouble about having a college president for a father is that it makes you so fearfully elastic in your affections. As soon as you get to loving somebody good and hard he graduates, so you have to begin all over again.

But no more lovemaking for me! I've met my Waterloo; my heart's dead within me. I think it might help to tell you about it — there's nothing so ghastly as bearing sorrow alone, is there?

Well, you know I don't care for blond men, they are so Englishy. And I don't care for handsome men, they are so conceited. But this man, both blond and handsome, was divine. I met him at the October German. After the dance everybody was teasing me about my rush from the Yankee. "Helen's Yankee" they called him. He was mine, too, by right of discovery. He had come down here for his health, some heart trouble, regina pectoris, I think they called it. That's the reason he did so little work, and had so much time to frivol with us.

Of course I held my breath to see if he was coming to call. When he did, though, I had the mortification of my life. He had been abusing his boarding-house, and without thinking I said:

"Do come in the dining-room and let me find you something to eat!"

When we got in there, will you believe it? I couldn't find anything but bread and preserves. That's the awful part about having so many little brothers, they are more devouring than a plague of locusts. Imagine feeding that swell Bostonian on bread and preserves just as if he had been a tramp. He was nice about it though, pretending that it reminded him of childhood days.

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After that he was here continually. Such good times as we did have! He was so clever I fairly sprained my mind keeping up with him. And as for sentiment, he piled it on, thinking we liked that sort of thing down here. He was always talking about affinities, mental telepathy and ideal womanhood. He held, with Browning, that a soul rested here merely for the meeting and mingling with that other soul for which it was created. Having lost that, it lost what it had lived for. Then growing more personal, he told me that his father instantly recognized, upon meeting his future wife, the ideal of his cherishing. Naturally he expected to do the same.

Terribly exciting, wasn't it? I struggled to live up to my idea of his ideal girl until I almost had nervous prostration. When a tender pause would come in the conversation, with the fire flickering low, I'd think surely now he was going to tell me that I was it. But he only implied unutterable things, was never really tangible.

We got on famously, though, until Junior Speaking. That's a great time in our college. The mothers and best girls all come, the star-speakers compete for the Orator's Medal, and the Glee Club furnishes music between each number. Carrington, the leader of the Glee Club, is a quiet fellow with a lovely voice. When the boys heard that his sister, who was coming, had a voice too, they asked for her to sing a solo.

That night the hall was packed, the Juniors quaking, when suddenly something burst from behind the scenes. We were too dazed to believe our eyes. There fluttered a buxom person in a frock that had mostly run to train. In a musical voice she began to sing:

"Any rags, any bones, any bottles to-day?
For the old ragman is ercomin' this way."

Flirting her fan as she sang, she ogled the student body with her bold black eyes. The boys, thinking it the biggest circus they'd ever struck, applauded until they all but knocked the floor out.

There, in the midst, sat Father with the poor old professors, petrified with horror. They couldn't very well drag the lady off the stage, and there was no more stopping her

than an alarm clock. Actually, in her ardor, she lifted up her train to cakewalk up and down before their reproachful eyes.

Oh, it was rich! I laughed until I cried, then I felt so sorry for Carrington I almost cried in earnest — to have a sister come to his own college to make such a fool of herself. Later we found she was only his stepsister, who'd always lived in Texas, so he hardly knew her himself.

As the girl had a pile of money her mother had brought her up here to cut her wisdom teeth on us, then she was going to take her to New York to catch a crown prince. For Carrington's sake I called on her and she didn't seem quite so breezy off the stage. But the next afternoon while strolling with my precious Yankee, talking of the blue things of the soul, we heard her coming, and on such a bleak day her red dress did give a touch of color to the landscape. Her cheeks, too, were like mountain apples, her black hair was flying in the wind, but you never saw any creature so shriekingly exaggerated, so impossible.

"Isn't she stunning!" my Yankee gasped. "Goddess of Autumn!"

"Stunning!" I giggled, thinking he was joking until I glimpsed his face. His eyes shone with a queer mellow light, he was looking at her as a man looks only at the woman who has bowled him over.

She held me up, talking like a buzz-saw, until I had to introduce them, my heart turning to lead within me.

"So sorry I can't ask you to call," she began, "but as I'm not out yet Mama swears at the fellows. I go walking at five o'clock every afternoon, though, so if you're cute — "

By that time I was out of hearing, just walked off and left them, before he knew I was gone. The details are too harrowing to repeat. He walked with her that afternoon, and the next and the next. Then they swung the train for Washington.

When the telegram came saying that they were married I'll tell you the old lady flung fits. She left here breathing out slaughter and vengeance, vowing she'd see 'em starve before she handed

out a penny. Poor chap, he didn't know the bank account was in the old lady's name.

They are talking about a divorce now, I hear. Wouldn't it be awkward if he were to come back? I simply couldn't survive it.

There's one queer thing, though, instead of pining away like a truly blighted girl, I've gained two whole pounds. Isn't that disgusting?



Brothers by Number.*

BY WILLIAM JUSTIN HARSHA.



"I'M Number Thirteen in a gang of brothers," the guy says to me.

"You look it," says I.

"What — unlucky number?" he asks with a grin.

"Mebbe," I answers dry-like, for I was figurin' what would be *his,* if he come any tricks on me. "But I was thinkin' you looks like one of a gang."

"Sure thing!" says he, spittin' through his teeth.

"I'll forgive ye if you'll show me the trail out of this."

"You'd better come down to the Cave," says he. "It'll soon be night and your hoss is lame."

The Cave! I had the beginnin's of a case of shivers as it was, and these words didn't help me none. This feller looked some villainous. He was a robber and a murderer, I was sure. Fiery red hair, close cropped, eyes small and set almost touchin', and crossed at that, bullet head, short thick-set body — all complete. And then — "The Cave!" I had run into a holdup outfit, sure enough.

"When did you git out?" I asks.

"How did you know?" asks he, grinnin' still wider.

"I'm somethin' of a mind-reader, you savvy."

"Left Sing Sing the first of last May," says he, as easy as if he was talkin' of movin' from one cabin to another.

This was promisin', now wasn't it? Here I was, lost on the wrong side of Gore Cañon, a dense forest for miles around me, my bronc gone lame, and, "last but not least," as the story-fellers says, a plump five thousand of money in my inside vest pocket.

It was Ted Jordan's doin's — or rather, the doin's of Ted's wife. She had to have the money all in hundred dollar bills;

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no bank draft for hers! She was goin' by stage, come Tuesday, up to Dillon and so down to Denver for the Christmas shoppin' and Ted (he's the big cowman for whom I'm boss puncher) had sent me into the bank at Radium to git the dough. And I was new to that side of the Grand, too. So was my bronc. Between us we was lost good and plenty.

And here shows up this cut-throat maveriek, choppin' of green aspens and pushin' down dead ones, right in the heart of a thousand-square-mile reserve!

"Lead on!" says I. "Ill try your Cave."

There was nothin' else for it. I had to git shelter for myself; it was a December evenin' and the silver-juice was droppin' fast to thirty below. And my hoss needed rest and fodder. I had my gun, of course, and I figured that I could win through.

"There's twelve more of you in this here Cave?" I queries, careless like.

"Fourteen — countin' Brother Number One. We are numbered as we comes in."

"So you are not the last of the bunch, to come in."

"No. Brother Number Fourteen is jest out of Albany — burglary — and Brother Number Fifteen has jest been pardoned out of Cañon City — manslaughter."

"That so! And Brother Number One is your captain," says I.

"Yes," says he, pullin' down his ear-flaps.

"What's *he* in for — or rather, *out*?"

"We're all *out* for a livin'," says he, with his cussed grin. "As for Brother Number One, it was forgery, I think. That was a long while ago. His hair has growed out."

So then I had the show sized up. Brother Number One was due for the first taste of cold lead if it come to a free-for-all shootin'.

I was leadin' my cayuse, for he was dead spent, and old Thirteen walked on ahead of me. I took pains to see that he did. He carried only an ax, as fer as I could see, but he was some quick on his feet and powerful built and active and so long. I wasn't goin' to take no chances. Ted allowed I could bring the money through and I was sure figurin' on doin' it, for all that the goose-

flesh was standin' up all over me. And this wasn't from the cold alone, neither.

The mountains on the south side of the Gore has always been a likely place for outlaws; I knowed this. And there's a particular gulch what we calls "Robbers' Roost," but I didn't know jest where it lay. Perhaps I was in the aforesaid. And a "Cave!" I'd heard of such dens.

So we mosied along and bimeby we come to a gate in a wire fence and we takes down a stiff trail to a clearin' in the woods and bimeby we come to some stubble fields and then to a group of log buildin's. In the door of a long squatty ranch-house stands an old guy in overalls and jumper, what says to me:

"Welcome to the Cave, stranger!"

"Howdy!" says I, guarded like. I was glad the lower end of my gun-case was tied down. This helps a feller to git said gun out in a hurry, if it is needed, you savvy.

"Brother Number Seven!" sings out the old chap. "Take the gentlemen's hoss."

A one-eyed ruffian shows up and leads the bronc away.

"Come in, stranger! Come in!" cries Number One.

I looks around casual but sharp. I didn't see no cave. But I saw a whole passel of other things — rifles and shotguns and axes and villains. The which villains was the rummest lot I've saw in my short and somewhat varied career. They was all "Brothers." The way they went on with their brotherin' made me sick — in more ways 'n one. It was:

"Brother Number Four, will you fetch in a armful of wood?"

"Brother Number Nine, it's your turn to git a pail of water from the spring."

"Brother Number Eleven, you'd better help set the table."

And so long. It was all too sweet to be wholesome. You bet I takes care to keep eyes front and back to the wall.

Of course the old feller was Brother Number One, the captain of the gang; you've guessed that. I studied him like Ted does a steer when he's buyin', but I couldn't make him out. He was tall, gentle-spoken, kind in the eye. He wore his hair long and said hair was as white as snow. No whiskers, no mustache, a reg'lar gent in looks. But I knowed, of course, that some robber captains

is like that and I wasn't taken in. I hugs the pocket what held the five thousand and I lightly touched my gun now and then, makin' as if I was feelin' for my handkerchief. It did me good to know it was there handy — the gun, I mean.

"Easy to git lost in these woods," says the Cap.

"Yes, I never been on this side before. I belong to Ted Jordan's outfit," I informed him.

You see, usually that would knock some light into a feller, for Jordan is known in our parts as a man what defends what belongs to him, whether man or beast. But old Number One's hair didn't rumple none and I set him down as a cool customer. He paid no more notice to Ted's name than a wild cow does to a quirt when she has turned to bay.

Well, we talks on some, random, and bimeby the mob of murderers clumb in for supper, fifteen of them in all, as the guy had said. What a bunch! Some had long hair — these were the brothers from numbers two to about eight; some had hair about half growed out, they numbered from nine to eleven. The balance was cropped close. So I could tell about how long each guy had been out of the pen. And all of them had the lock step, all right, and fell into it natural as they shambled in.

"Set up!" said one brother, who was along about number twelve, and I started.

I'd figured that I'd git near the door, for I saw that the push was too big for anything but a runnin' fight. But old Cap. hauls me up to a chair beside him at the head of the table.

"All right," I thinks, "I'm handy to give you *your* dose, anyway."

The supper was good enough and we pitched in. And the talk! Say, them fellers wasn't at all backward about comin' forward as to their past doin's. It was a reg'lar love feast of confessions.

"In the old days when I was a yeggman," says one, and then he gives us a yarn of what he used to do.

"When I was a second-story operator," sings out another; and so it went. And such thieves' slang! And they all told without a wink about bein' in prison here and there and for how long. I've heered men talk in some languages and several states, but I never did hear men talk like they did, and all of 'em smilin'

blissful. I thought they was thinkin' what easy meat I'd be for breakfast.

After supper we all stacked our dishes and I leaned my chair against the wall with a full view of proceedin's. I couldn't make out why they didn't git busy, if they'd had a tip about my money. About half of 'em went out. Of the rest some cleaned up the dishes and some smoked. Perhaps, for all there was so many of them they kind o' thought it would be healthy to sneak in on me after I'd gone to bed and git me.

"I don't see no cave," says I to old Cap. as I rolled a cigarette.

"*This* is the Cave," says he, wavin' his hand promiscuous.

"What? This ranch-house?"

"The whole place. It's the Cave of Adullam." And he smiles sweet.

I was sure stumped. Never had heard of it. Didn't know there was such a place in the Park. Old Cap. sees me wonderin' and he goes to smilin' a soft, kind, sort o' merry smile. Bimeby he says:

"I'll explain by tellin' you a little story."

Now, say, I can't give you his words. He could talk fine. About what he says was this:

Once there was a king. He was a bigbug king. He had soldiers and cities and palaces and wives and so long. One day he goes wrong — sins, you savvy, and then the good Lord goes after him hot. He gits kicked out of his palaces and his enemies git the drop on him and he goes flyin' to the mountains and he hides in a cave at a place called Adullam. And then, because he'd been ornary hisself he thinks of all the poor cusses what was left back on earth. And so he sends out word: "Come on here, you poor devils! We'll live together and make good. I hain't got much, but what I have is yourn!" Well, so all the tramps and fellers what had been in jail and those who was down on their luck and was in debt and was sore in their souls — they all runs to the king in that there cave.

Old Cap. he tells me all this and I see a tear in his eye and bimeby says he:

"I sinned when I was a young feller. And I came out here. And these brothers has all gone to the bad. I takes 'em in and we

The Lion and the Aunt.*

BY WILLIAM H. HAMBY.



RS. CORNWALLIS WINTERSET adjusted her nose glasses and looked at the card.

"Yes," she said, crisply to the attendant, "I will see the gentleman directly — in parlor A."

Mrs. Winterset was at the Baltimore. She had been in Kansas City several days ordering her wardrobe for the fall campaign. She was generally leader and always near-leader of society in Flower City, Kansas. And even in a beautiful, peaceful town of only ten thousand one cannot retain so coveted an honor without eternal vigilance — and never-lasting clothes.

As she swept down the hall — Mrs. Winterset always moved as though society were looking on — she glanced again at the name on the card and the penciled line beneath it.

T. FISHER NORMAN
Wishes to see you relative to society matters.

"Mr. Norman?" She lifted her brows, slightly.

"At your service, madam." He inclined his head and stood until she was seated.

"You wish to see me?" She spoke crisply — suspiciously. She was a straight, spare woman of fifty-five; held her head well up, had thin tight-fitting lips, a high forehead, and a gray pompadour.

"Yes." His voice was mellow and pleasing. "The fact is, Mrs. Winterset, I am a relative-to-lend. That is my business."

"What?"

"To explain," suavely. "You know how it adds to a social affair to have a lion present —some distinguished guest. And

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what prestige it gives the hostess if the famous person happens to be a relative.

"Now that is my business, to be a lion and a relative. I am an expert and can be to perfection a foreign ambassador, a famous painter, a noted author, a millionaire pork packer — anything in fact that would take best in your town. At the same time I can be any sort of relative from a long lost brother to a second cousin from India."

Mrs. Winterset remained stiffly upright — non-committal. But she was interested. This very thing had been the greatest thorn in her social side — she had no relatives — to speak of. Mrs. Bradley Brown, her most troublesome rival, had a cousin in Congress and an uncle on the supreme bench of Utah.

"It is easy," continued the young man, guessing her thoughts. "No doubt you have a sister or brother or other near relative that no one in your home town ever knew. I can be the son of that one, and any sort of celebrity you wish. What sort of distinguished person would be most lionized in your city?"

"Author" —quickly. "They would go daffy over a real live author."

"That is my favorite occupation," he smiled.

Mrs. Winterset studied the young man critically. He was a fine looking fellow and certainly could play his part. She hesitated. Never in her life had she wanted anything half so much as just what he proposed. It would squelch Mrs. Bradley Brown's pretensions for all time. And yet her conscience squirmed — a little. She had always held her family to a very rigid accounting for every deception, however innocent — and now for her to deceive them! But the memory of Mrs. Bradley Brown's recent inroads into her following and her haunting smile quickly won the young man a job. She agreed to pay him a hundred dollars a week for two weeks, and at once entered into careful details.

At breakfast the morning after her return Mrs. Winterset glanced at her husband and daughter in a cool self-contained way and remarked :

"I have a surprise for you."

Flora did not manifest any enthusiasm. Usually her mother's surprises were not to her liking.

"Well, Susie, what is it?" Mr. Winterset was always good-naturedly obliging.

"Did you know sister Kitty?" she asked her husband.

"No, I think not." He held his coffee cup in the air, trying to remember.

"She married," explained Mrs. Winterset, "before our folks moved west, and died a year after her wedding. There was a son, but his father took him to Europe and I never saw him — until day before yesterday."

"Why, Mamma!" Flora looked up suddenly interested.

"Is that so?" Mr. Winterset put down his cup.

"He happened to be in Kansas City," continued Mrs. Winterset, "and saw my name in the society notes of the *Star,* and hunted me up."

"Why, Mamma! You don't say?"

"Well, I declare!"

"Yes," deliberately. "And he is T. Fisher Norman, the great writer. He is going to visit us Thursday."

"Glory!" Flora gave the table a sudden whack with the palms of both hands. "Won't that be fine? Any sort of a man — even a cousin, will be a relief."

"Flora." Mrs. Winterset looked at her daughter with cold disapproval. "Will you never acquire any reserve? You can never expect to be a social success until you do. Such an outbreak is in very bad taste — especially over a man."

Mrs. Winterset could never see what use any girl would have for a man, unless she desired to marry him to advance her social position. Hence she had always frosted all Flora's budding love affairs, for Flora cared a great deal more for fun than for social prestige. She had a good complexion, a fine figure, an excellent appetite — and played tennis.

The two years' rivalry between Mrs. Winterset and Mrs. Bradley Brown had resulted in a series of most remarkable social events, each one surpassing all that had gone before. But so far the score was a tie — the leadership still hung in the balance. But that afternoon when the *Daily News* came out with a wonderful and beautiful front page story of the reunion of the aunt and the famous nephew, and announced that the great author would

visit in Flower City shortly, every woman who read the account knew that Mrs. Winterset was one ahead. A big one at that, for a family with a lion is not to be sneezed at — it isn't safe.

Mrs. Winterset and Flora were on the porch Thursday evening when a carriage drove up, and a fine distinguished-looking young man stepped out.

"Is that he, Mamma?" Flora asked, excitedly.

Her mother nodded.

With a bound Flora went down the steps to meet him. "This is cousin Fisher?" She impulsively put out both hands and tilted her chin invitingly. He promptly accepted the invitation.

Mrs. Winterset received the long lost nephew with a chilly handshake and a glittering eye. To one who did not know her "reserve" as well as Flora, the greeting would have appeared cold, indeed.

But the mother's reserve was more than compensated for by the daughter's frank delight. It was plain from the first moment that the cousins would get along famously. So plain, indeed, that Mrs. Winterset spoke to him about it next morning most severely.

"You are aware that neither Flora nor her father knows?" He nodded.

"Then see that you do not presume on the relationship."

"Why, certainly not, Auntie," he said, in all seriousness. "But what could I do? You must admit that it would not have been cousinly to have refused to kiss so charming a girl as Flora when she offered to be kissed. And, besides, it would not have been in keeping with the literary temperament.

"Rest assured, dear madam, that I will do what is best for you all the way through." And she believed it. "Now about my books and the magazine I edit, it will be best to be reticent. I naturally will avoid discussing my work. You may mention only two books, "Days in Genoa," and, "The Tragedy of Theo Didymus." These were really written by a man named T. Fisher Norman; he's dead, that is why I got his name. For the rest, put them off, suggesting that when I consent, you'll give a list of the wonderful things I have written — and the name of the magazine.

"You see if you give it now, there'll be a whole lot of people

commercial club, of which he was president, to give a banquet in honor of the great writer.

While all this brought glory and satisfaction to the Aunt, she found, like other conquerors, that there is bitterness in victory. Aside from the growing pains of conscience, she walked as on burning sands — fearful that at any moment the bottom might drop out. Simple questions, natural enough, about the great man, always sent her heart into a panic, for although in reality there was not the slightest suspicion, it seemed to her every question was to try to ferret out her guilt. And poor Flora — dear innocent child, to deceive her — Her husband, too, but it doesn't matter so much to fool men. But suppose Flora should be carried away by the glamour of his supposed greatness and —. Again she put it out of her mind. Thank heaven a few more days would end it.

Wednesday evening the Wintersets were to give a farewell party for the distinguished nephew. Great preparations were made. The house was to be wonderfully decorated, and an orchestra had been hired to come all the way from Topeka. This was to be an event Mrs. Bradley Brown could never duplicate.

That morning T. Fisher Norman escaped from the hubbub within the house, and took refuge in the wide spaces of the yard. He had scarcely settled himself with a book when the reporter for the *Daily News* appeared and reminded him of his conditional promise to tell something about his work before he left.

"I beg to be excused," he said, rather shortly. "I'd rather not discuss my books. Of course, if my aunt is willing to give you any information — I shall not object."

The reporter went into the house and found Mrs. Winterset quite willing to give a full account of her nephew's work — his method of writing, the books he had published, and the scholarly magazine he edited.

A little while later a reporter for the *Argus* appeared, and likewise was hinted into the house to interview the aunt.

At five o'clock Mrs. Winterset looked around and drew a breath of satisfaction. The decorations were complete — beautiful too; everything was in place, all was in readiness for the greatest social event in the history of Flower City.

There was a little time to rest and she went out to the porch. The newsboys had just thrown in the afternoon papers. These she picked up and sat down on a straight-backed porch chair. She opened the *Daily News* first and read with satisfaction the two columns on the front page devoted to "our distinguished visitor." The reporter had done well; he had used the information accurately. There was the list of books exactly as she gave it to him — "A few of the leading works of T. Fisher Norman: 'Unconnoted Excerpts from Carlyle,' 'The Esoteric Value of Imaginative Propulsion,' 'The Peruvian Decalogue of the Initial Period,' 'The Decimation of the Progenitors of the Dutch.'"

The last paragraph was particularly good:

> Mr. Norman is also editor of that great technical publication the "Skynote Magazine," which circulates among scientific societies of every part of the world. And while he is a very busy man and a profound scholar his great dignity does not prevent him from being a thoroughly agreeable and likeable man. Flower City is proud to have had the honor of entertaining him.

And then Mrs. Winterset opened the *Daily Argus* — a little resentfully, for its reporter had not interviewed her. A headline caught her eye, and with a jerk she brought the paper nearer her face and read the opening paragraph:

> T. Fisher Norman, the well-known author of the popular dime novel, "Kitty and the Kiss," in whose honor his aunt, Mrs. Cornwallis Winterset is elaborately entertaining this evening, is an interesting character —

Mrs. Winterset's mouth opened and closed spasmodically as she gaspingly read what followed — a column of the most amazing preposterous stuff ever printed. The blood came to her head until she was dizzy, and the cold chills played hide and seek along her spine.

There was the list of his best known books: "A Double Dyed Sin," "Charley Ross and the Dairy Maid," "Heartease and Merry Widows," "Kitty and the Kiss," "Darling Susie Murphy."

And as a finishing touch the reporter had closed with:

> T. Fisher Norman looks the part. He might well be the hero of one of his own blood-and-thunder, lovey-dovey stories. He is a striking looking fellow — a regular heart-breaker, but withal a jolly good fellow.

Mrs. Winterset sat gripping the paper as though in a nightmare and could not let go.

"What is the matter, Auntie?" The young man saw her distress and came from the hammock to the porch.

"Read that." Her hand shook as she held out the paper. Oh, she was ruined — disgraced — ruined forever.

At that moment Flora came tripping out, bubbling over with fun. They dropped the paper and exchanged warning glances.

"Oh, Mamma," Flora dropped into a chair and began to rock industriously, "isn't it the greatest fun to have a celebrity in the house! You hadn't more than got through with that reporter and started down town this morning, when another one came. And of all the stuff I told him!" She waved her hand and laughed immoderately. "I told him Cousin Fisher writes from one to four in the morning; wears peach stones in his shoes for inspiration — and you just ought to see the list of books I gave him." She went into another uncontrollable fit of laughter.

"Yes" — and her mother's tone sobered her — "I've seen the list — and we are ruined." Then forgetting her long acquired reserve she gave Flora a grilling that took the fun out of even that irrepressible girl.

It was certainly a brilliant assemblage for Flower City that gathered that evening to do honor to the parting guest. And from the first it was a delight to the company — but unmitigated torture to the hostess. Mrs. Winterset went about her duties like an automaton. Although her face was as expressionless as a Spartan's, inwardly she winced every time she heard, as she did often, such fragments as "Strange —," "I wonder if it —," "What do you think —," "Seems funny to me —."

But T. Fisher Norman was self-possessed, charming — master of the company, and as always the lion of the hour. And during a lull in the conversation and laughter Mrs. Winterset heard him say in response to some raillery from Mrs. Bradley Brown:

"You can hardly imagine how mortified I was by that article in the *Argus*. It was all the mischief of that irrepressible Cousin Flora. I really am the author of those books, you know, but I would not have it generally known for anything. I write them purely for recreation — to give my mind a rest; and I

had kept the secret pretty well, until I was trapped by Flora and made to confess. Then the little wretch gave me away."

He laughed at the joke on himself — so did Mrs. Bradley Brown — so did the others who heard. The explanation was quickly passed around the company, and it was plain almost every one believed it. Mrs. Winterset breathed easier. She almost loved the young man; he certainly was clever.

Mrs. Winterset and Norman had just bade the last guest good night and good-bye.

"It's over." She sighed, with relief.

"It was a great affair. They had the time of their lives."

"You think they will believe your explanation?" She was yet a little uneasy.

"Am sure of it," he replied, positively.

Just then Flora came in. She had been to the gate with some young people.

"Well, Mamma," she said, penitently, "I fixed it up about that nonsense in the *Argus*. I told Charley Bird, the reporter, that it wasn't so, I made it up just for fun, and that Cousin Fisher is not the author of any of those silly books."

Mrs. Winterset dropped into a chair and gripped the edge of a table.

"There it is again," she gasped.

"Why, what, Mamma?"

"Go to bed," she snapped, and Flora went. Then the mother, seeing certain exposure of her deceit ahead, collapsed and began to sob hysterically.

"There, now, Auntie," the young man soothed sympathetically. "It'll be all right. I will explain it to-morrow so you will never be suspected."

"Explain it?" she flared, wrathfully. "It's been explained now till everybody just knows there is something queer. I'm ruined socially — ruined. I wished I'd never seen you — Get your things packed to-night and get out of my sight just as quick as you can in the morning."

He, too, obeyed instructions, and next morning followed his things to the station.

Mrs. Winterset, too miserable and crushed to stay at home and

face Flora's questions, accepted a telephone invitation soon after Norman's departure, and went to spend the day with one of her staunch followers.

When she came home about five o'clock the *Daily News* was on the step. She hated the sight of a newspaper, but could not resist the desire to see what it said about her party. The first thing that caught her eye was the heading

AN INTERESTING ELOPEMENT

and with a heart that chugged like a motor engine she hurriedly read: —

> A very interesting romance culminated this morning in the elopement of Miss Florence Winterset and Mr. Fisher Norman Wharton, who slipped off to the county seat and were married at two o'clock this afternoon.

Mrs. Winterset grew blind — she thought she was going to faint. Her foolish deception had not only disgraced herself, but ruined the happiness of her innocent daughter. Poor Flora married to that hired adventurer!

In a moment she recovered sufficiently to read on:

> Incidentally the young people played a great joke on the young lady's mother, Mrs. Cornwallis Winterset, the acknowledged leader of Flower City society. The young folks became attached to each other while Miss Flora was away at school. But the mother, not wishing her daughter to marry for a few years yet, never would consent for him to visit at the home. Hence they made up a plot. Mr. Norman Wharton, whom she had never seen, interviewed Mrs. Winterset in Kansas City, and represented himself as a great writer and her long lost nephew. That he succeeded in deceiving so shrewd a woman as Mrs. Winterset is sufficient evidence of his ability. In fact he easily fooled the whole town until he laughingly gave away the joke to-day.

Mrs. Winterset began to breath easier — really then the people did not know. She finished:

> Mr. Norman Wharton is, by the way, a prominent lawyer of Quincy, Illinois, and has recently been nominated for Congress. His election is assured. The happy young couple will return to Flower City after the honeymoon, and no doubt will be forgiven.

For the first time in two weeks Mrs. Winterset smiled comfortably.

"Bless them, I should say so!"



The Netzuke.*

BY LAURA CAMPBELL.



Y gentle and somewhat eccentric friend, Mark Crome, of Gramercy Square, North, is the proud owner of a small but admirable collection of Japanese netzukes.

He keeps them in a heavy glass case that stands at one end of the large mahogany table in his study. Mark Crome's study! I am sure that there is no corner in the great city of New York that is more peculiarly restful, more finely peaceful, than Mark Crome's study! When I go to see him of an evening, I always take my place in the old brown easy-chair that stands beside the case of the rare netzukes, and with my pipe between my teeth, my ears gratefully listening to the modulated tones of Mark Crome's voice, and my eyes feasting, with strange delight, upon the exquisite delicacy of the marvelously carved trinkets at my elbow, I find, within half an hour, that all the cares and carking annoyances of the work-a-day world without have quite slipped from my soul. I am a rough fellow, with but few sensitive chords in my heart for the artistic or the beautiful; but certain it is, that these few chords, such as they are, never fail to respond to the rare charm of my friend's netzukes.

I know that Crome thinks it queer — incongruous — that I, of all men, should be interested in these magically wrought articles of beauty from far Nippon. Once or twice I have caught him smiling, quizzically, at my frankly rough exclamations of admiration when holding one of the dainty things in my big palm. He wonders, perhaps, why I should have so keen an affection for these, while, at the same time, I look with cold eyes upon the many old prints, paintings, tapestries, and bronzes with which the delightful room is furnished. Well, I cannot explain it myself. All that I am certain of is that whenever I feel an attack of world-weariness

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stealing upon me, I make for Mark Crome and his netzukes as unerringly as a bee makes for his hive.

This mood of utter world-weariness was particularly strong upon one drizzling afternoon in December, when, after two years of hard hustling through all the capitals of Europe, I once again set foot in New York, and, with quick adjustment, reassumed my place as a briskly moving atom among all the other atoms in the multitudinous human eddies of the city. Needless to say that I had not been in town six hours, when, almost unconsciously, I found myself taking my way toward the old red house on Gramercy Square, North.

I glanced up at his windows as I turned the corner. Yes, he was at home. My heart leaped warmly at the gleam of his red lamp. I wonder why it is that Mark Crome's lamp shines more humanly, more sympathetically than any other lamp in the world?

I put the question to him in a brisk, unsentimental way, as I stepped across the threshold of his study. He laughed gaily, as he withdrew his welcoming hand and motioned me toward my old brown chair. It still stood, I noticed, beside the netzukes at the corner of the table. I immediately sank into the luxurious comfort of it with a deep sigh of relief and appreciation.

"You're coming round, Reynolds," he answered, jestingly; "I see you're coming round! In the artistic way, I mean. First, you develop a taste for my netzukes; now you begin dimly to perceive the ravishing beauty of my lamp. Soon, my dear fellow, we'll have you collecting old prints, Fortunys, perhaps, who knows?"

I shook my head; but, at the mention of his netzukes, I turned toward his collection, and peered eagerly into the case, my eyes dwelling on my old favorites with renewed interest and admiration.

Crome was eagerly questioning me about my travels. I answered absent-mindedly. Curiously enough, I felt an almost shamefaced longing to gather up some of the trinkets before me so as to add the sheer delight of touch to the enjoyment of my eyes. There they all lay before me — atoms of perfection in ivory, metal, and horn, wonderfully carved, inlaid, lacquered, and enameled; there was a quaint little Japanese mother with a baby on her back; a tiny Japanese man, in crouching position, with grotesque features,

and in cloak of brilliant blue — doubtless he had once hung jauntily suspended from the tobacco-pouch of some ancient prince of Nippon. Or, perhaps —

"Good heavens, Crome!"

My sudden exclamation was a tribute. For as I leaned far over the case, my eyes had suddenly been startled by a miniature masterpiece in ivory — a new netzuke! I had never seen it before. Evidently my friend had been fastidiously adding to his collection during my absence. The netzuke represented a young girl of Japan, carved as if by a fairy's lightness of touch, every fold of her dress soft-flowing and natural, every feature of the small face perfect and of a wondrous purity. Surely, the thing was the masterpiece of some genius. I looked up.

Mark Crome was rubbing his hands together in great satisfaction. All the enthusiasm of the connoisseur was gathered in his eyes.

"Isn't it a beauty? Isn't it ripping?" he asked, gleefully.

He came to my side, and for a moment we stood looking down at it in silence. Then he carefully opened the case. I almost gasped when I saw that small white thing actually between his fingers, and when he offered it to me for inspection, I shook my head. Not for worlds would I have trusted it to my rough palms. In its fragility, it looked almost uncanny. And I wondered, as I looked, how the man before me had come upon it. Although Crome was "very well off," as the phrase goes, I knew that, by no means, could he have been placed in the category of the wealthy.

He looked up in that instant and read the question in my eyes.

"Oh, there's a story to it," he said; with that, he replaced the lady in ivory in her niche and motioned me again to my chair and to my pipe. He busied himself for a minute with the contents of a cabinet that stood near. Then, with the glasses and tobacco handy between us, he settled himself comfortably and began his tale.

"It was carved by Natobe," said he; "in this very house, up under the eaves, and" — he smiled, enigmatically — "I paid for it with a priceless ruby!"

I was mystified. Who was Natobe?

"Been hobnobbing with Japanese princes?" I queried, encouragingly.

He shook his head, smiling.

"Do you remember Jungoo Luk?" he then asked, irrelevantly.

I certainly did. The name brought to my mind the smiling image of a rascally Persian shopkeeper in New York — a fellow of evil parts, *I* was sure, whatever my trusting friend, Crome, might have thought of him. Crome, I knew, for a good while before my departure, had been in the habit of spending many idle hours before the cheerful fire that Jungoo kept burning in the little square space back of his shop. And his shop, the show-case, the innumerable boxes on the shelves, were filled with a veritable junk-heap of old curios — every one of which, in my opinion, was on its last legs. That, of course, explained Crome's strange affinity for the Persian. I daresay, he reckoned that he would one day find great rarities in that junk-heap!

"Well, that is where I found Natobe," he explained, triumphantly, as though reading my thoughts, — "in the junk-heap."

"You know," he put down his pipe at last and began to talk, coherently and steadily; "you know, I never despaired of treasure in that old shop, although I suppose, a more conventional collector would wonder why, in heaven's name, I ever thought to look for it there. Sometimes, I wondered myself," he smiled, quaintly; "for to tell the truth, as the months went by, the search grew hopeless — not a little bit o' brass worth paying for turned up, and I had almost resolved to erase Jungoo and his junk from the map of my mental geography, when, one misty, soggy November morning, I came upon a new netzuke!"

I nodded toward the case. "That?" said I, holding my breath.

"No; another. It was hidden in a huge, wooden bowl of common glass beads. It was the wonderful scarlet of it that caught my eye as I was turning them over; and, fool that I was, I exclaimed aloud at my discovery, and the wily Luk was instantly at my side. I took it over to the light for examination. It was a little Japanese boy, grotesque, rotund, with a great, globe-like scarlet cap upon his head — an odd bit. Instantly, of course, I desired the wee netzuke with all my soul. But — I threw a sly glance at the dark face of the Persian by my side. What would the

heathen ask for it? Did he know its value? Reynolds, I am not rich, and my heart sank when I saw that the rascal had measured my desire, and had already set his price. I walked back to the wooden bowl, and carelessly, indifferently, I tossed the precious thing back among the glass beads. And I had the satisfaction of seeing that, simultaneously, Jungoo Luk's ambition dropped near to zero.

"I did not go again — too soon; quite a month later, I think it was, and as I passed the little show-window, again that gleam of wonderful scarlet caught my eye. Jungoo Luk had placed the netzuke in a conspicuous position against a background of black velvet. In my heart I congratulated the Persian.

"I stood there, in the sunlight, staring at it avidly. More than ever did I desire it. That exquisite object I must have or — I stepped toward the doorway, determined to drive a bargain. But I had hardly put my fingers on the knob when I stepped back, almost affrighted.

"Facing me, on the other side of the glass behind the showcase, was the calm, imperturbable countenance of a young Japanese. It was the wonderfully clear eyes, looking directly into mine, that had startled me. But I don't believe he ever saw me, for in the next instant his gaze had left mine, and the whole expression of the face had changed. Reynolds, they say that these little brown men never allow any of their emotions, in visible expression, to get farther than their Adam's apple. But in that instant, on that clean, young face, and concentrated in those almond eyes, I saw such an upwelling of hopeless longing, misery, and despair as I have never seen on the face of any Caucasian. Startled, I involuntarily followed his gaze. Reynolds, he was staring at the scarlet netzuke! He, too, desired the curio, and for some special and secret reason of his own. I had a rival.

"I opened the door and stepped across the threshold, almost brushing shoulders with the Japanese as I did so. But he did not look up. He did not seem to see me or hear me, so intent was he upon that scarlet gleam in the window. I walked quickly to the back of the shop. Jungoo Luk, the lazy fellow, now that he had evidently taken an assistant, was improving his time with dozing over the fire. I tapped him on the shoulder.

"Instantly the man was upon his feet, wide-awake and suspicious; his glance swept inquiringly from me to the dark figure that stood by the show-window in the front of the shop.

"'You meet Natobe? You speak with Natobe?' he asked in his slow, broken English.

"I shook my head. Then I resolved to test him. 'Natobe was too completely absorbed in that little red toy that you've put in your window,' said I.

"To my surprise he flung back his head and laughed, gaily. 'Hah-ee! Ye-es! Natobe much stuck on little red toy. And so, Jungoo Luk have the great fun — what you call it? — joshing him. Natobe very, very poor; but he ask Jungoo Luk how much the little red toy. So Jungoo put on it the so great price. Natobe — hah-ee! — too poor to pay, too honest to steal — he break heart with the longing. And so I keep him in the shop. He good workman, he mend and dust and shine up — so.'

"'Well, 'tis a pretty toy,' I said, indifferently; I cannot blame him.'

"Then it was that Jungoo surprised me. 'You buy?' he queried. I shrugged my shoulders, uncertainly. And then he named his price. It was ridiculously low. The netzuke was mine.

"He went to the front of the shop to get it. When he returned, the little man of Nippon was close upon his heels. Reynolds, you should have seen his eyes. Hungrily, despairingly, they followed every smallest movement of the Persian's hands as he wrapped the thing up and handed it over to me. I put it in my inner pocket. Then it was that Natobe transferred his intense interest from the Persian to me. He riveted his brown orbs upon me in a look that was positively uncanny in its calm, determined steadiness.

"I knew, as I passed out of the shop, that I had not looked my last upon Natobe. I felt a mild curiosity as to when the events of the future might transpire.

"Well, they transpired much more quickly than I expected; for I had hardly returned home, and was just slipping into my smoking-jacket, when the door-bell rang, loudly. The next moment I heard Johnson's heavy step ascending the stairs. He informed me that a foreigner, a Japanese, was below and wished to see me.

"I looked over Johnson's shoulder, the foreigner was not below. He was there, in my doorway — my little friend of the Persian's shop. And he was smiling at me engagingly.

"'Honorable Crome' — how quickly he must have weaned my name from the wily Persian! — 'Natobe have come.' He announced it with an air of finality. 'Natobe work hard, Honorable Crome, you give Natobe orders?'

"He put down his bag for a moment, and looked about him with a proprietory air, as though he had already taken possession of the place. And all the while his honest brown eyes were smiling, joyously. Before I knew it, I was smiling back at him and — I was giving Natobe orders. I engaged him on the spot.

"He proved to be a wonderfully useful little fellow. He could do anything, everything; but before long, I had given him the special care of my study; he tended it with faithful assiduity.

"The one thing odd about him — though to me it was very appealing — was his intense and constant interest in my collection of netzukes. Of course, I had placed the new scarlet atom in conspicuous position among them. Many times, when I entered the study, unexpectedly, early in the morning, or late at night, perhaps, I found him there, bending longingly over the case, his eyes so intent upon the contents that he seldom was aware of my presence until I had been a good five minutes in the room.

"I became very curious about him. I questioned him; but he was inclined to be reserved. For a long time I could get nothing from him, save that his ancestors, for generations back, had been skilled craftsmen in objects of art — some of them, he hinted, had even been designers of the wonderful netzukes.

"But another day, when the burden of his longing had become too great for him to bear, and he was at last too weak to resist the kind persistence of my questionings, he told me his story and — the cat was out of the bag.

"'Honorable Crome' — he looked up from the case over which he had been bending; 'Honorable Crome, you have — the very great love for the objects of most joyous beauty?'

"He did not wait for my answer. He knew what it would be. 'Honorable Crome, the objects of most joyous beauty are more precious to you than the so great money? — even more precious

than'— he hesitated curiously for a moment — 'even more precious than the wondrous jewel — the priceless ruby?'

"'More precious than rubies, Natobe,' I assured him; you know, Reynolds, I never have cared much for precious stones.

"Then it was that my little Japanese gave a great sigh of relief.

"'Now, Natobe know for certain,' he said, 'that Honorable Crome would not break — would not spoil the so joyous netzuke — no, not even to get the priceless jewel that lies hidden in the scarlet cap.'

"I stared at him in amazement, wondering if he had not gone mad. But, Natobe, smiling, pointed to the new netzuke in my case, and insisted that a precious gem of marvelous purity and great worth was concealed in the large crown of the scarlet cap.

"Moreover, he said that the red netzuke had been carved in Japan by his own father, that the ruby it contained had been in his family for many, many generations, had descended in unbroken line from eldest son to eldest son, and was the sacred love-stone of his ancestors!"

"The love-stone of his ancestors?" I exclaimed at the quaint mysteriousness of the term.

Crome nodded. Then he explained to me the pretty superstition. The stone was handed down, it seems, from father to eldest son, presented to the latter on his betrothal day, securely sealed in the netzuke, which the father had carved in his own betrothal days, and whose parts were so cunningly joined together, that the ruby could not be released save through the utter destruction of the netzuke. On the son's betrothal day, however, the netzuke was broken open, and the precious gem, after its long imprisonment, again brought forth to the light of day, when, for a short space, it remained in the proud possession of the prospective bride. Then the son must carve a new netzuke, after his own design and skill, in which, on the wedding-day, he again securely reseals the sacred stone, until the day shall come when he, in turn, shall present it to *his* eldest son. Should he fail to do this, or should the son, for any reason, fail to present his betrothed with the love-ruby of the family, a curse — so ran the legend — would surely fall upon that union.

"Have you not guessed the sequel?" continued Crome. "Na-

tobe was an eldest son. Five years ago, in Japan, he had fallen in love with a little, brown maiden, who lived in the Seven Isles of Izu. When Natobe, in great haste, begged the precious jewel of his father, the father desisted a bit, saying that he would like to exhibit the scarlet netzuke in his shop for a few weeks before he parted with it forever. He kept a shop of curios. And — well, there was a stupid clerk, a dull-witted fellow, who, on the third day, sold the sacred trinket, with many other objects, to a Persian merchant from New York. The price offered had seemed good to the dull-witted clerk. Thus — the netzuke disappeared.

"Imagine the consternation at the discovery! To Natobe there seemed but one thing to do. Rather would he die than marry without the stone and run the risk of bringing a curse upon his progeny. He hurried to the Seven Isles of Izu, bade a heart-breaking farewell to the little maiden of his heart, who promised to be ever faithful, and set sail for New York on what seemed an almost hopeless quest, to recover the precious ruby of his ancestors.

"Well, you partly know the rest. He worked in every Persian shop in the city, one after another, searching, wearily, for five long years. Then one day he came to Jungoo Luk's and saw the scarlet netzuke in the window, where Jungoo had placed it after noting my admiration of the thing. Now, Natobe was honest. The netzuke really belonged to the Persian, so he reasoned, for he had purchased it, in good faith, at his father's shop. But the price — ah, fabulous! — Natobe was in despair. But he did not give up hope, and, doggedly, he determined to keep on the trail of the netzuke and eventually re-purchase it, though it might take years for him to accomplish his desire.

"You know how he followed me. Do you think, as he was telling me this tale, that I suspected that he would end by trusting to my pity and begging me for the stone? Well, perhaps I did. But the little fellow had no such thought. He ended by assuring me, with dignity, that he would one day offer payment for the netzuke, and that I should be more than satisfied with his offer.

"After that, for a long while, save for the two hours that he spent every morning in my study, I saw him but little. All day, and every evening he absented himself. Once or twice, when I was coming home very late at night, I observed a dim light burn-

ing in those little windows up under the eaves — in the room that had been assigned to the Japanese. I wondered, vaguely, what he could be doing. I was soon to know.

"I came down to my study one morning, and instantly saw that the place had that day been neglected. My table was an untidy mass of papers — just as I had left it the night before. Natobe was nowhere to be seen.

"With quick suspicion — of which I am now ashamed — I crossed over to the case. The scarlet netzuke was gone! But — and you may imagine how startled I was when I saw it — in its place lay — the miracle!"

Crome nodded triumphantly toward his collection. "Natobe had paid! And I think you will agree with me," he went on, "when I say that all the genius of his ancestors is surely concentrated in his little masterpiece!"

He paused for a moment to fill our glasses. I stared at him, considering. Did the man believe the tale? Yet — the snowy gleam of the white netzuke caught my eye. There it lay. I was puzzled. Nevertheless, I put forth my little protest.

"But if, by any chance, the yarn was true, Crome — good heavens, man, with such a stone you could have bought twenty such collections!"

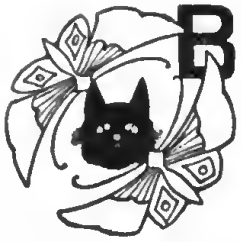
But Mark Crome only smiled in his slow, exquisite way. "You have forgotten the little maiden in the Seven Isles of Izu," said he, "more precious than any netzuke — more priceless than any ruby!"

To which I said nothing. Indeed, how could I have replied to such angelic foolishness as that?



No Thoroughfare.*

BY MARY A. P. STANSBURY.



BENTON had engaged his new private secretary without seeing her, at the recommendation of a friend whom she had served similarly and well. Time was when his fastidious taste must have been reckoned with even in such a case, but a bitter experience, which he did his best to forget, had changed all that. He told himself with perfect sincerity that woman, as woman, had ceased to interest him. He had not, indeed, adjured all feminine friendships, but their value to him resided merely in the sexless charm of the intellect. The question as to whether so casual a personality as that of a private secretary were attractive or otherwise was quite out of the range of his consideration. The one qualification beyond ordinary skill and exactness which she must possess was a capacity for quiet.

Benton composed slowly and with the utmost painstaking. His was not the Balzacian method of the revised manuscript interlined out of all semblance of legibility,—the despair of reader and copyist. His best results were accomplished in the seclusion of his own mental workshop, unaided by outward sense. There he molded a sentence as a sculptor his statue, or polished, like a gem-cutter, the sparkling facets of a phrase.

It followed that there were often considerable intervals in the process of dictation,—intervals which former amanuenses had employed, each in her own way, and with not infrequent interference with the progress of the novel.

One had discovered that, by skilfully craning her neck in one direction or another, she could see what might be going on in the street below. The rustling of her skirt and the starchy cracking of her tailored waist indicated the shifting of her point of view. Another would idly ripple the pages of a book or

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magazine which she evidently had no intention of reading. A third had an exasperating fashion of swinging her foot, or beating the time of some popular air with a pencil upon the arm of her chair.

Benton resented the mental distraction caused by such small idiosyncrasies. "Am I not sufficiently master of myself to be able to think outside of Caspar Hanser's cave?" he mused angrily. But, in the end, he yielded, deciding once for all that if quiet were purchasable the market-price could be scarcely too high.

By the end of her first morning's service, he was assured that Elinor Le Reve knew how to sit still when unemployed.

"Rayburn must have given her a hint," he reflected gratefully.

But he was then far from grasping the full significance of her repose. He was yet to learn that it was neither the relapse of a naturally indolent nature upon temporary ease, nor the conscious self-repression which only feared to disturb. Rather it seemed due to the possession of inner resources accessible at any moment.

At work, she was a model of practical capability. Ear, eye, and hand were alert. Her quick comprehension was like that of the skilful accompanist who both follows and sustains the singer. But let silence intervene and at once she was away. The mobile lines of her face responded unconsciously to the stimuli of a secret thought-world of which her employer could guess nothing.

He acknowledged to himself a certain interest in her as a character-study long before the perception was forced upon him that her withdrawals left him with an odd, unreasoning sense of lack before which composition languished.

"I am a fool!" he thought self-contemptuously. "What to me are the vagaries of a girl's mind? Have I not learned only too well how Madonna-brows and inscrutable lips may cover emptiness — and worse? Is it not enough that I am well served?"

He made her read her notes over and over,— at first for the pleasure of hearing her voice, low and mellow as the sound of a bell. Soon he began to listen with another purpose. All

unaware to herself she was becoming his critic. Her tones thrilled in response to passages into which he had poured his soul, or slid with level coldness over such as fell below his high-water mark of expression. "Dress-rehearsals for the public," he named the readings with cynical humor, all the time knowing well that he should recostume or discard altogether whatever she might seem tacitly to disapprove. Where in her humble station could she have acquired such fineness of taste, such subtle power of discrimination? The answer must lie somewhere in that unexplored region whither her fitful wanderings left him lonely.

"Where have you been?" he suddenly demanded, one day, when she sat awaiting his bidding,— her head leaning on her hand and her lovely face averted.

She started, flushing, but in a moment she understood. That was the beauty of her, he thought, that she could always be trusted to understand.

"A long way from here, Mr. Benton," she answered, smiling.

"I beg your pardon, but — would you mind — telling me?"

"Not at all." There was a beautiful softness in her face. "It is all childishly simple,— a garden sloping down from the rear of an ancient house all weather-stained to silvery satin by the salt sea-air. Old-fashioned flowers run riot in it,— clove-pinks, marigolds and poppies and larkspur, blush-roses, the all-summer bloomers, and hollyhocks much taller than the little girl playing among them. A yellow-legged bumblebee plunges into the heart of a blossom. Laughing, the child gathers the tips of the petals together and holds him booming angrily in his fragrant prison.

"A low, musical call sounds from the house.

"'Yes, mother!'

"The child sets free her winged captive and runs joyously up the graveled path. A lady is standing just outside the door, a lady with the loveliest face in all the world. She holds something covered by her muslin apron,— something that stirs — is alive! Reaching down she lays it in the child's arms — a tiny puppy, hardly more than a bunch of silken curls, thrilled by the rhythmic throbbing of a little, loving heart.

"'For me?' The child scarcely dares to breathe. Oh, the ecstasy of the moment!

"'For you!'

"The loveliest face smiles on the child — and then — "

"And then?"

"You called me back, Mr. Benton."

"I called you back! But you will go again?"

"I fear I must sometimes." She smiled enchantingly. "I really cannot help it. But I shall always be here when I am wanted."

"I wish I might be sure of that!"

It was the man's heart, not his lips, that spoke.

Days passed before he missed her again.

"I have caught you!" His voice was gleeful as a boy's. "You have been with the child? Tell me."

"This time," she answered, "It was evening and the child's bedtime. She lay in her mother's arms with the dog pressed to her breast. The whispering of the elm-leaves stole in through the open window and a wakeful bird chirped fitfully.

"'Tell me the "clarion," mother.' The child nestled closer.

"The mother had been young before Mrs. Hemans went quite out of fashion. Her thrilling voice rose and fell to the sonorous rhythm of 'The Captive Knight.' The child had never asked the signification of 'clarion.' She did not wish to know. Her own fancy wove a meaning for it,— strange, wild, piercingly sad and sweet.

"'Sound again, clarion, clarion, loud and shrill!'

chanted the mother. The child's whole body trembled. The little dog licked her face. The leaves whispered 'Still! Be still!' to the breeze. The note of the bird sounded once and was silent. The child was asleep."

* * * * * * *

"What is the child doing to-day?"

Benton had waited long to ask the question.

"She is not a child any longer, and there are others — strangers — in the ancient house and garden. She is a young girl in an old graveyard.

"It is a very peaceful place walled about with pines that whisper, 'Hush! hush! lest they waken! They have had enough of toil and pain. Let them sleep! Hush! hush!'

"But the pines, tall and dark as they are, are not too dark or tall to shut out the sunshine. There is more of it there than anywhere else,— no blinding dazzle of light, but a tender, tremulous brightness broken everywhere with cool bits of shadow, like the pauses in music.

"All the air is full of a wordless singing. If there lived an artist who could make a picture of sound, he might, perhaps, paint a background of cool gray for the steady flowing of the river through the valley below, and trace upon it the bobolink's note — an arabesque of vivid scarlet, bordered by quaint line-drawings in blue and gold for the thrumming of crickets and katydids, and shaded at the edges into a delicious blending of all hues for the thousand small noises of a summer-day's life, out of which only Mother Nature herself can distinguish each beloved voice.

"There is no close-shaven turf anywhere, but the long grasses nod gently to the breeze and drop their small, brown seeds trustfully upon the earth to await the sure resurrection of another springtime. Bright-winged butterflies flutter over the graves and soar aloft like freed souls until they are lost in the blue air.

"The girl pulls a wild blossom here and there until her hands are quite full, then she weaves them into a garland and, kneeling beside one of the green mounds, lays them reverently upon it. The loveliest face is hidden there."

"But it left behind its smile!"

Benton breathed rather than spoke the words, but the girl heard them. The spell was broken. Turning to her machine she adjusted the ribbon with a hand that trembled.

Weeks slipped away, but Benton's novel moved more and more slowly and the secretary's moments of waiting grew longer. Some change had fallen between them. His eyes sought her face more openly but, if she felt the regard, she never answered it. She held herself erect, businesslike. The lines of her figure held a new suggestion of tension. He looked in vain to see the arms relax to the old, unconscious grace,— the far-away ex-

pression drop like a veil between the two worlds of fact and dreams.

But, one day, suddenly she was gone once more. Her beauty — ah! he had long known how beautiful she was! — glowed like the heart of a rose opening to the sunshine. Gold glimmered in her hair, a sea-shell color fluttered on her cheeks, her mobile lips parted in a tender curve. The man's starved heart ached toward her with an intolerable yearning.

"Miss Le Reve."

Though he spoke so gently she started as if to a blow.

"Yes, Mr. Benton. I am ready."

"But I am not. You have been wandering again. May I know where?"

Her look fell.

"There is a warning across the path,— 'No Thoroughfare.'"

He rose and crossed to her, standing strong, masterful, compelling her unwilling eyes.

"Tell me" — his face was very pale — "whom did you meet on that path?"

She faltered.

"I — I cannot tell."

"You must!" He towered above her. "Answer me truly! Was it — by any blessed chance — could it have been — I?"

"It was you."

"And may I stay — with you — in 'No Thoroughfare' — Elinor?"

"You may stay."

Her voice was scarcely audible.

"And never come back?"

"And never come back."

Bending, he took her hands, lifting her until her head was at the level of his breast.

"I dreamed you, I think, while yet the world was young," he said. "Elinor Le Reve — Elinor the Dream! At last — at last — you have come true!"

A Borrowed Crime.*

BY SOLON K. STEWART.



ABE" ESTES used to hold forth in Leadville. Called 'im Babe 'cause he was six foot one in his sock feet, had blue eyes an' rosy cheeks an' a soft voice. He shore had a soft voice, did Babe, an' when any one riled him he used to talk softer an' softer an' lower still; an' the madder he got the softer his voice would be, till you jest could hear him. But, Lord! There warn't no need to hear what Babe said when he was good an' riled. His eyes said it fer him and thar warn't no mistakin' their meanin'.

Babe was a plump good all-round man; an' when he warn't line ridin' on the Colorado Ranch Company's range, he'd be punchin' fer Thompsons. Then when he'd get to pinin' fer the gaities of city life, he'd git his time check an' slope into Leadville an' keep in Ike Parton's chip emporium, or go to dealin' faro at the Blue Goose. It didn't make no difference to Babe — he was equally handy with lariat, gun, chip, or card, was Babe.

Well, it happened once when Babe was in this frame of mind he got his time from the foreman an' meandered down the trail to Leadville with a parchment callin' fer ninety dollars secreted in his ray-ment. Babe was feelin' mighty peart, an' by the same token mighty liberal, when he hit town, an' when he drew up in front of the bar of the Cozy Corner gin dispensary he was accompanied by a thirsty throng that could 'a' drunk the Rio Grande dry, an' then wondered when it would be time fer a drink. Each an' every one of 'em had unlimited capacity, able to down any given amount, so to speak.

When the orgy was over, Babe had twenty-five left out o' his bunch of ninety bones an' desirin' to have a leetle more of a fling afore takin' up agin the ard'ns duty of workin' fer a

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livin', decided to go up agin Ed Parker's faro game.

Babe moseyed over to Ed's gilded palace of sin, an' plankin' down a V, got a stack of blues. When the night's session was over, Babe was three hundred and fifty to the good. He sa'ntered over to Delmonico's an' after ablutin' at the tin basin at the back, ambled into Pete's ham an' one in the dark. While Babe was feedin' Pete strolls over to his table an' passes the time of day.

When they had talked a while Pete remarked, kind o' casual like, he reckoned the new waitress from Cañon City would git in on the mornin' stage.

"Got a gal comin'?" asks Babe.

Babe was allus interested in the fair ones an' they all cottened to his at fust sight, owin' to his six-foot one, his apple face an' blue eyes; but more speshial to that soft, beguilin' voice of his'n.

"Yep," says Pete, "comin' to make herself useful an' he'p Vashti in the dinin'-room.

"Don't be tryin' none o' your tricks on her though, Babe," says Pete, anxious at the look that cum into Babe's eyes, "she's a good gal, savin' money to pay off a mortgage on her mother's farm back in Injanny. Been workin' at Condor; but the camp's gone dead an' hearin' I was on the lookout fer a handy gal, writ to me to tell me she'd take the job, ef I was agreeable. I said I was an' she's to be here this mornin', as per agreement."

He hadn't mor'n got the words outen his mouth when they heard the rumble of the stage turnin' into the main street past the smelter, an' by the time they got on to the gallery, it had drew up at the post-office.

One of the boys opened the door an' out jumps the trimmest article of femme-nine beauty that had ever come into that cultivated an' enlightened community. She turns about sort o' unconcerned an' asks a question. The boys, as Babe an' Pete seen from the gallery, nearly breaks their necks, each tryin' to nod at the hotel fust. She thanks 'em an' gatherin' her super-fluous drapery in one hand an' carryin' a grip in the other, trips over to the hotel.

Rollin' her orbits of blue up at Babe, him bein' the strikin'est lookin', she lisps, "Is this Mister Judd?" which same Judd was Pete's official patternimick.

For the fust time in his life Babe was stumped by a woman

talkin' to him. He blushed an' stammered, "Nope — that is to say, no mamm — miss — that's him with the ingrowin' face."

She thanked him an' turned to Pete an' told him her cognomed was Rose Higgins, an' she had arrived strung high with expectancy as to enterin' on her new duties.

She had sat her grip on the floor when she come an' as she spoke to Pete she held out her left wrist as ef she was goin' to take something offen it with her right hand.

Then she give a kind of screech an' looking at Babe with a dyin'-calf expression, jumped down the steps, an' afore you could say, "I'll put two on the red an' bet four on the even," she was across the boulevard an' peerin' into the stage, the fellers all erowdin' about askin' what was the matter an' ef they could he'p her any.

She pawed the seats some minutes an' lookin' at 'em, gives the follerin' information, "It's gone!"

In course they was sorry to hear it, even ef they didn't know where it had gone, nor how long it would stay — to say nothin' of not knowin' what it was, was gone.

Then afore they could get incredulous, she told 'em.

"It's my pocketbook," she says. "You see, I had it in my hand-bag, an' when we was comin' into town I opened my hand-bag to use my powder puff, an' when we drew up I put it on the seat here to get my grip, an' when the door was opened I got out an' left it lyin' on the seat, an' it had three hundred an' fifty dollars in it to make the second payment on Mother's farm, an' now it's gone an' I don't know where to git it agin, an' they'll foreclose on Mother's farm, an' whatever am I to do?" sayin' it all in a breath, as ef she was afeard she'd forgit what she was sayin' afore she could say it.

When she told 'em of this meetin' with misfortune, they opined they was awful sorry an' asked her ef she was sure she hadn't left it at the last place. But no, she was sartin she had it when she driv up an' somebody had stole it.

They offered reasons an' excuses for its disappearance; but as none of 'em was bringin' back her purse, she left 'em an' moseyed back to Delmonico's.

The boys went into executive session an' 'lowin' she appeared

to be a sport an' took her loss better'n most women would an' how she was one lone woman in their many, it was up to them as God fearin', patriotic citizens of the city of Leadville to recoup her losses. They passed the hat an' in a jiffy had raised the required long green.

Dan Lessin' was made spokesman an' goin' over to the hotel, while they waited, so's not to embarrass her by force of numbers, made a speech, sayin' as how her loss had cut 'em to the quick an' that they hoped she'd take the money, which totaled the amount she'd lost.

But she was a person with ideas of her own on etiquette an' propriety an' couldn't see her way clear to takin' money from men she hadn't saw a hour afore. She told Dan this in nowise onsartin language an' Dan stood an' wilted. He felt so remorseful an' ashamed that he couldn't bear to face her, an' takin' a hoss hitched back of the hotel, left Leadville, where life would a been sad after havin' insulted a lady so. He clean forgot to hand back the money to the boys — which shows how easy shame can affect a man of finer feelin's.

Well, t' make a long story short, Rose went to work an' the boys come to see her and eat three meals a day an' would 'a' ate four, ef Pete would 'a' served 'em, an' everything was fine an' dandy.

Leastwise, everything 'cept Babe, who ordinarily was so handy with his tongue, but hadn't a word to say to Rose. He'd sit an' mope an' stare at her, silent; though anybody with half a eye could see she liked him and was willin' to meet him half way.

Finally, when he'd mooned about for a week or so, he went to Delmonico's one day an' beckoned Rose to come out o' the dinin'-room. An' I reckon she wasn't half glad of the chanst to talk to him, seein' 's how the week past he had been gettin' the choicest cuts of beef, the best dish of puddin' an' the biggest hunk of cake.

When they got on the gallery, away from everybody, he stood an' twirled his hat in his hands. Finally he looked at her an' said: "Miss Rose, I've allus calculated that the man who 'ud mistreat a woman is the low-downdest, most ornery cuss in the world. I allus thought I'd be the fust to put a bullet in him — an' here

I've gone and done the very wust thing a man could do. I've — "

An' here Babe choked an' turned half away from her; while she stood an' looked s'prised, wonderiu' what was comin'.

" Miss Rose," he managed to get out after a minute, " you see afore you the dirtiest cur, the mangiest kiote, as ever slunk through the back alleys of Leadville. I've gone and did what a derned stinkin' greaser would rather cut off his hand than do — me! as has always called myself a white man.

" Miss Rose, it was me that took your purse that day you come to Leadville an' I've been feelin' meaner'n a dawg ever since. I know I ought to be shot an' I ain't makin' no excuses; but I don't want you to think I'm all bad. This is the fust as well as the last time I've fell. Here's your money — an' I hope it won't be unlucky for your mother from havin' passed through such hands as mine."

He handed her a roll of greenbacks you could 'a' knocked a man down with an' afore she could say a word, he was hikin' down the road.

She stood holdin' the money, lookin' after him. She didn't make a sound, but just looked. She had a way of openin' her eyes an' lookin' cool an' contempt'us at a man who displeased her, I kin tell you. An' she shore did despise him, seein' he had give her such a scare 'bout the money, causin' her to suspect in turn every one of the boys, a hundred times better'n him. She was riled to think she liked a man as well as she did him — an' let everybody see it — an' him nothin' but a sneak thief, takin' money from unprotected female gals. Then she went into the house an' didn't show up in the dinin'-room till supper-time next day.

How the story leaked out, nobody never knowed; but by evenin' it was all over Leadville an' when Babe ambled into the Blue Goose an' offered to buy drinks for the crowd, they wasn't havin' none; an' the air was so hostile you could 'a' told trouble was a-brewin'. Ef it had a been anybody but Babe, he'd 'a' been lynched out of hand. But Babe was a real artist with a gun an' such a rapid and promiscus shooter that none of 'em cared to broach the subject to him. They did discuss it some, thinkin' of the money they had lost through his act, but nothin' come of it.

Every time Rose seen him comin' she'd cross the street to keep from meetin' him face to face. She had to serve him at meals, but she'd wipe her hands after handin' him each dish an' he'd grit his teeth an' look round an' finger his gun longin'ly an' wisht he could catch some one laughin', so's he could plug him an' relieve his feelin's. But whenever he thought he'd heard a snicker an' looked that way, he'd see the man with a long face pourin' his coffee into his saucer, or pickin' a fly outen the gravy.

One day Steve Sanders made some crack 'bout a man who'd steal a kid's savin' bank to buy pizen to give a widow. Quick's a flash Babe's gun was in his hand an' in a second more it would 'a' been all day with Steve. But jest then Rose, carryin' a plate of soup, looked at Babe an' calmly stepped into the line of fire.

Course, there was nothin' to do but put up his smoke wagon an' finish dinner peaceable. But all who knowed Babe knowed more was bound to come of it, an' either Steve or Babe was billed through to Kingdom come.

Howsoever, three days passed quiet, though every one was on the stretch, an' ef a door slammed sudden they all come on the jump.

Then the big thing come off.

Steve had a claim that he worked out from town an' went to work the Monday followin' the ruction in Delmonico's. Babe Estes had saddled his cayuse an' rode off the road past Steve's claim. 'Bout three in the afternoon a man comes gallopin' into town an' yelled into the door of the Cozy Corner, "Steve's kilt — murdered!"

When the boys crowded out of the saloon an' gathered 'round his hoss, he said he'd been ridin' past Steve's shanty, when he seen him lyin' in a pool of blood.

They was discussin' the news, when the town busybody, puttin' the one an' two he had together to make the four he wanted, opined it must 'a' been Babe, who'd sneaked up behind Steve an' mashed in his head with a rock, so's he could make his getaway 'thout makin' any noise. Course, the boys, knowin' how things was between them two, nacherly come to the same conclusion.

They adjourned inside to the bar an' begun lickerin' up so's to be fit fer apperhendin' Babe. In the meantime,

some of 'em went out an' brought in Steve to Delmonico's.

Jest as they was goin' to start, Babe walks in. Soon's he was inside, he seemed to feel somethin' was wrong an' kind o' hesitated, while his hand strayed to his right hip. They only sat an' looked at him, though, an' in a minute he walks past 'em to the bar. As he raised his glass, three of 'em jumps an' in a minute thar was progressin' in the Cozy Corner the beautifullest rough-house Leadville had ever saw.

It was even money for a while whether they'd git him 'thout anybody bein' hurt, or whether he'd get his gun into action. Force of numbers told, though, an' wrastlin' his gun away, they tied him up with a lariat an' stood him up agin' the bar, where he could see an' be seen.

"Well, you got me dead to rights," he says, when he got his breath, "though I can't see as it's goin' to help no one. I've give the gal's money back an' she's satisfied. So what cause has you got to handle me so rough?"

"That's all right 'bout the gal's money, Babe, but how 'bout Steve?" says one of 'em."

"Steve?" answers Babe. "Why, there's jest this — me an' Steve's got it in fer one another an' is bound to have it out, sooner or later. But I reckon he's able to look after hisself, an' you ain't got no cause to be buttin' in."

"No he ain't able to take care of hisself," says old Ezra Crawford, "an' we has got cause to interfere. We likes you, Babe, — leastways we did afore you stole that gal's money — but law's law an' we can't have no one cavin' in men's heads in Leadville. So, howsoever much we hates to do it, we is goin' to string you up quiet an' peaceable soon's all the boys' here."

When Babe heard Steve was kilt an' him accused of doin' it, he didn't say a word for a minute, but jest stood thar silent. Then he begun to swear, soft an' easy. Fust, he jest said a few simple cuss words, jest to get his tongue in order. Then he cussed things in general an' Steve in particular. Then he turned to the assembled crowd an' addressed 'em collectively, individilly an' in pairs. He raked 'em fore an' aft, an' though he was a lone man, an' him tied hand an' foot, they wiggled an' twisted under that lispin' voice like kids caught spendin' their Sunday school money

on beer an' nigger heel terbaccer. An' ef you knew Leadville in the Sixties, you can git some glimmerin' idee of what I mean, when I say Babe Estes cussed.

Thar seemed so much truth an' honesty in what he said an' he seemed so earnest an' sincere in damnin' 'em all, that they was almost inclined to misbelieve their own judgment.

As they was arguin' the point, the door was slammed open an' Rose Higgins waltzes in. When she seen Babe tied an' showin' signs of the scrap he'd jest been in, she gives a cur'us cry an' goes right over to him.

"Turn that man loose!" she says, sharp an' sudden-like, an' thar was somethin' in her voice that made 'em do it.

Then she says to him, so low you could hardly hear, "Why did you do it? You has made every man in Leadville despise you an' nearly lost your life for killin' that pasky Steve. I ought to a knowed better, right at the start. Why, you was standin' on the gallery when I come over an' asked ef you was Pete. You told me that lie to make me take the money. Why, why?"

Babe was kind o' flabgastered at that, comin' atop the prev'us excitement, an' couldn't say a word in answer. But his eyes was enough fer her an' she blushes clean to the top of her head. Turnin' to the boys an' facin' 'em brave enough, she says, "Gentlemen," an' they took it in silence, "gentlemen, you see afore you the best an' noblest of men. It was his own money he give me that day an' he said it was mine he'd stole, so's I'd take it. An' I never seen through it till jist now, when that ornery critter Steve come to an' afore he died, said it was him that took my money an' wanted to ease his mind afore he went over the divide. He'd fell on his head while he was workin' on the side of the hill an' had managed to crawl that far when he was found. He was plump grieved when he heard Babe was suspected of havin' done it. He told me to come over here an' tell the boys how it was an' bid 'em turn Babe loose."

The boys was struck dumb; but Babe took her hand an' whispered somethin' in her ear which seemed to displease her, for she turned away an' began drawin' patterns on the floor with her toe. But he didn't seem to mind an' kept on insistin' on somethin' an' after a while she give in an' snuggled up close to Babe, right

there afore us all. An' we tumbles at last an' seein' how things was goin', give a yell you could 'a' heard at Cañon City.

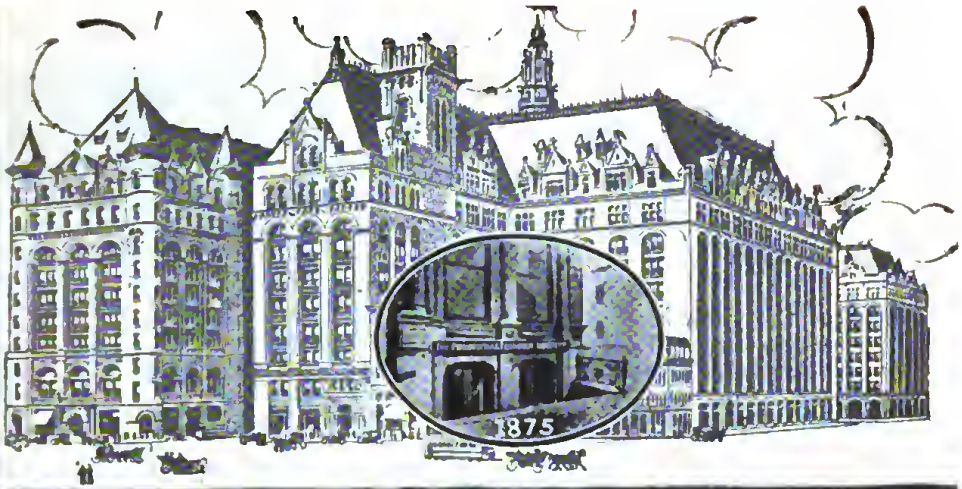
Babe raised his hand an' when we had all fell silent says, "Boys, I don't feel no grudge agin' you for what you've done, nor was goin' to do. Let it pass. What I have to say is this: I rode over an' got a job as foreman on the Bar Z ranch, this mornin' an' me an' Rose goes there as soon's we kin get spliced.

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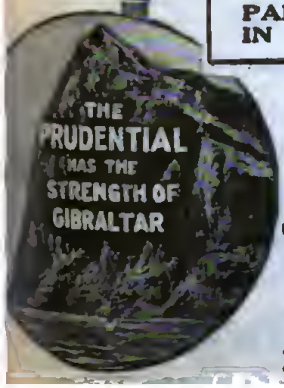
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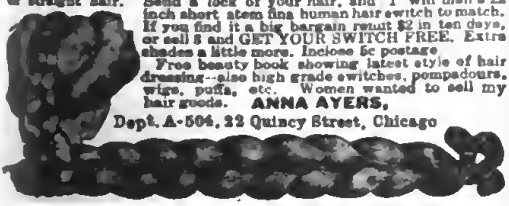
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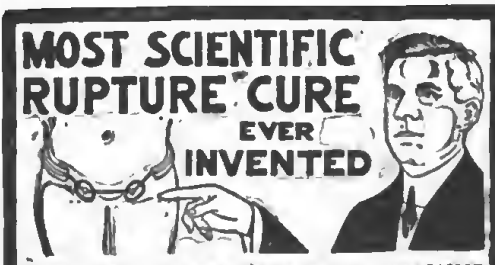
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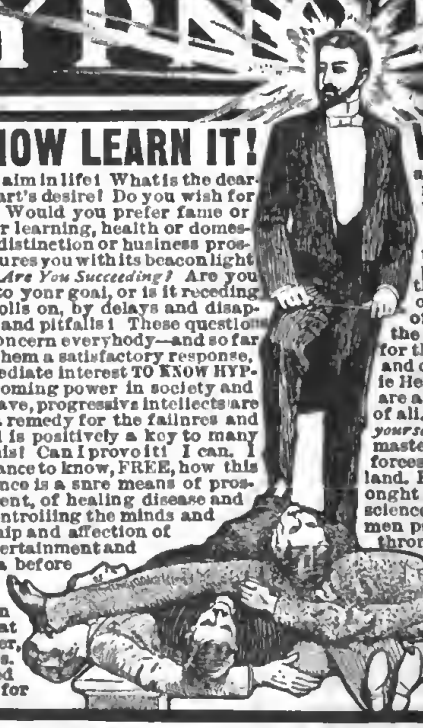


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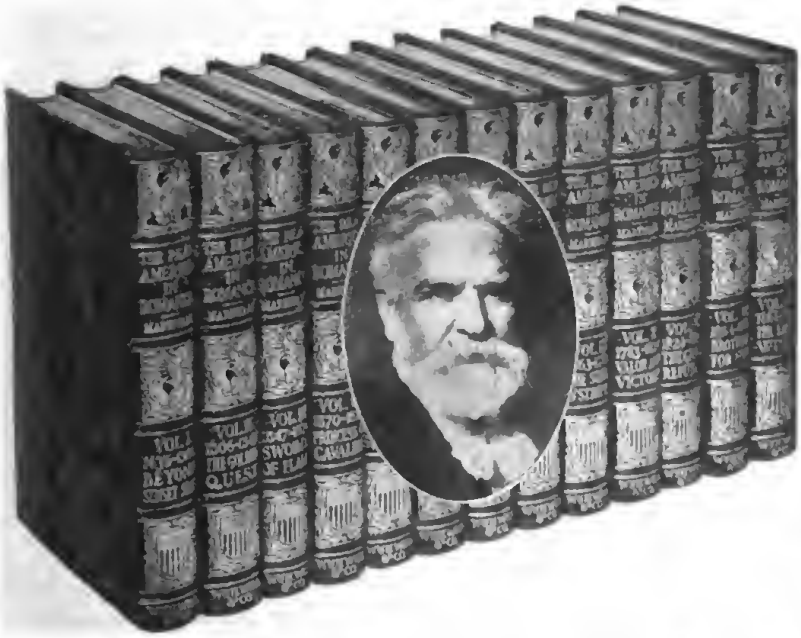
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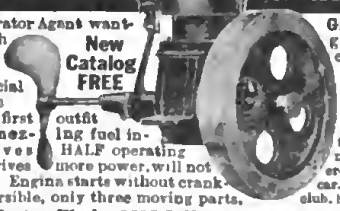
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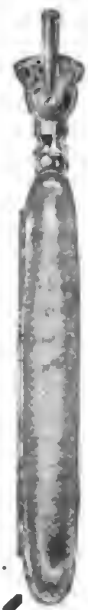
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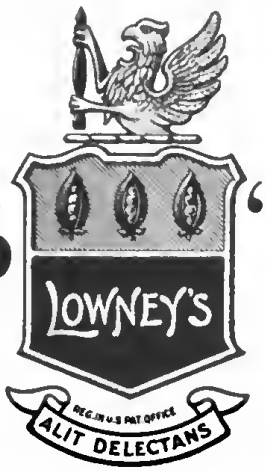
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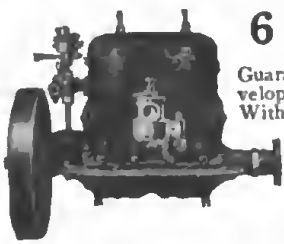
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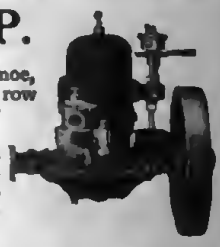
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